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Visually Dual: The Conflicted Image of Asian American Representations

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In *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America (2001),* Henry Yu observes the contradictory position Asian Americans occupy within western popular imagination understood as both a "racial 'problem' and as a racial 'solution'" (7). This dual role, embodied in the constructed images of the "enemy alien" and the "model minority," has had significant historical consequences. The former manifested itself, for example, in the forced removal of Japanese Americans during World War II to American concentration camps, while the latter has had serious repercussions in the interactions among other racial minorities within the United States, who in comparison to the assumed success of Asian Americans are viewed as inferior.[1] The constructed identities as both "enemy alien" and "model minority" are only two of the multiple racialized images that have served to prevent Asian Americans from full participation within American society.

In this essay I review scholarship that explores a trajectory of racially constructed images of Asian Americans, past and present. Within a Manichean discourse that positions good against evil, Asian Americans have had a dual role. Ironically, the Asian image becomes both good and evil, rather than one or the other, controlled through the reproduction and distribution of visual images within popular culture.[2] The effect of these images demonstrates not only the

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[1] Caroline Chung Simpson observes that Japanese American internment history has been camouflaged through the "commercial" use of such words as "internment," "detention centers," and "relocation centers" (186-187). In referring to the Japanese American internment as "concentration camps," many critics are quick to contrast this experience with the Nazi "concentration camps." For instance, Ronald Takaki observes that President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who signed Executive Order 9066, which ordered the forced removal of the Japanese/Japanese Americans, referred to these "camps" as "concentration camps" (148).

[2] Caroline Chung Simpson refers to the Manichean world, describing it as "good versus evil, of democracy and communism, that made U.S. supremacy and its structuring trope, the heteronormative order, necessary" (82).

ways Asian Americans have been racially codified but also serves to explain their juxtaposition against normative white American identity and culture. Take for instance the headline printed in 1998 on a MSNBC website "American Beats Out Kwan," referring to Tara Lipinsky's figure skating victory over a Chinese American, Michelle Kwan, a US citizen who was born and raised in Torrance, California.[3] Four years later the *Seattle Times* printed a similar headline, this time celebrating Sarah Hughes' gold medal for women's figure skating. It read "Hughes Good As Gold: American Outshines Kwan" (Astudillo). In both situations, Michelle Kwan's face became the antithesis of American-ness when juxtaposed with the faces of white Americans, Lipinsky and Hughes.

The above example suggests why Asian Americans historically have been excluded from American society. The presumption that Michelle Kwan is foreign because she does not look like a white American serves as the justification for various acts of discrimination and racism inflicted on Asian Americans. Consequently, the function of images within our popular culture is to illustrate reaction towards Asian Americans regardless of their citizenship status. In this essay, I explore four texts that help illuminate how mistakenly and unfortunately, Michelle Kwan as a foreigner has become the standard rather than the exception. First, Robert Lee's *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* traces the way Asians in America "have been made into a race of aliens" (xi). Lee's book examines how American popular culture justifies and dismisses the racism enacted against Asian Americans, reinforcing and stabilizing the construct of who are (and are not) "real Americans" (6). In addition, Lee identifies six "faces of the Oriental,"—"the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook" (8). Lee observes the production of these images as hegemonic constructions distributed through our popular culture in the same ways "blackness" – implicating African Americans – has come to signify and represent a limited image as "lazy" or "criminally violent" and "dangerous" through the racial constructs ranging from the "Sambo" to the brute.

Second, I utilize Krystyn R. Moon's *Yellowface: Creating Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s* to explore the performance of yellowface minstrelsy – whites imitating Asians – as a way to not only entertain but also to ridicule Asians while capitalizing on their assumed notion of inferiority. Moon's work explores how music, associated with culture, helped create original perceptions of Chinese inferiority. Her work highlights, for example, the contradictory ways Chinese were viewed with both revulsion

[3] This website includes MSNBC's apology for the original headline error (Ramirez).

(instigating their exclusion) and fascination (allowing Americans to take on a Chinese identity through "yellowing" up).

Third, I explore Caroline Chung Simpson's work, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960,* which examines how the struggles of Japanese Americans in the era of World War II are remembered. By examining the impact that visual imagery has in shaping how we remember the Japanese internment history, we can understand the ways Asians, specifically, Japanese Americans, remain visibly invisible.[4]

Finally, I examine Henry Yu's *Thinking Orientals,* a text that explores the role of social science in not only reinforcing the physical and psychological exclusion of Asians from American society (whether consciously or not) but also in constructing theories about Asians in America that draw on prejudicial imagery and discourse. These four works show how visual culture has functioned not only to isolate Asian Americans categorizing them as foreign and alien, but also to maintain and stabilize a normative American identity and culture.

Although the words "foreign" and "alien" are often used interchangeably to explain the difficult position Asian Americans find themselves in, Robert Lee shows them to be different terms in his book, *Orientals*. Lee explains aliens as "outsiders who are inside," while "'foreign' refers to that which is outside or distant" (3). Thus, he concludes, "Only when the foreign is present does it become alien. The alien is always out of place, therefore disturbing and dangerous" (3). Ultimately, it is not the foreignness that is the problem. Instead, he argues, "Such foreigners, whose presence is defined as temporary, are seen as innocuous and even desirable" (3). To Lee, "if the arriving outsiders declare no intention to leave (or if such a declared intention is suspect), they are accorded the status of alien, with considerably different and sometimes dire consequences" (3). Within this framework, we can then understand the ways Asians can be both condemned and celebrated for their foreignness.

Thus, according to Lee, the view of Asian residents as a "pollutant" (9) contaminating American society is amplified by the assumption that they have

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[4] I use the paradoxical phrase "visibly invisible" to describe the experience of Asians in America paralleling Caroline Chung Simpson's notion of an "absent presence." That is, while Asian Americans are an integral part of our American landscape, their significance is silenced. I developed this concept in "White Skins, Yellow Masks: How Visibly Invisible Asian Americans are Within American Popular Culture," a paper delivered at the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association 2007 National Conference, Boston, April 2007.

overstayed their temporary welcome (3). In many cases, they do not themselves create their image as sojourners. Rather, this notion—rooted in the perception that they are inassimilable (or lacking the desire to assimilate by holding onto their Asian cultures)—creates an image within the public eye that they are a problem requiring removal.[5] However, Whites also have embraced Asian foreignness by perceiving Asians as "exotic."[6] Thus, Asians have served a dual role in both repulsing and fascinating white Americans.

This double-edged image has manifested itself in several constructed Asian American characters through American history, including the coolie, the deviant, the gook, and the model minority. These character types, Lee argues, conveyed the message that Asians did not belong in the United States, but also satisfied white American fantasies of the unknown and helped to formulate a national American identity. First, Lee identifies the "coolie," which was a representation of the Chinese immigrant worker in the 1870s and 1880s (9). While the coolie was viewed as a slave, he also embodied the "threat to the white working man's family" (9) in taking jobs from white Americans. Ironically, the perceived threat of the coolie "not only allowed the nascent labor movement, dominated by its skilled trades, to exclude the Chinese from the working class; it also enabled the skilled trades to [denigrate] common labor, which was racialized as 'coolie labor' and 'nigger work'" (9). By racializing labor, thus demarcating a "white working class" (53) from Chinese and black labor, Irish Americans, for example, affirmed "their own claim to Americanness and a white racial identity [that] led the popular anti-Chinese movement" (9).

Similarly, the constructed representation of Asians in America in the 1860s and 1870s as "deviants," in their position as domestic servants, served a dual role (9). Lee writes, "On the one hand, the Chinese were indispensable as domestic labor, on the other, they represented a threat of racial pollution with the household" (10). Later the 1970s saw an image of Asian Americans as the "gook" or the "invisible enemy," because of the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War (11).

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[5] Robert G. Lee observes that in minstrel shows, while blacks "were supposed to lack culture," the Chinese "were seen as having an excess of culture" (35-36).

[6] One example provided by Lee describing how Asians were both rejected as a "pollutant" and embraced for their "exoticism" is the American public's fascination with the Siamese twins Chang and Eng, a part of Barnum's American Museum (30). He writes, "the forty-year career of Chang and Eng suggests both the shift in the signification of the Chinese from object of curiosity to symbol of racial crisis and the shift in the popular sites of that signification from museum to minstrel show" (32).

By having their identity reconstituted as the Viet Cong within America, Asians were "everywhere invisible and powerful" (11). Finally, the image of the model minority in the 1960s and 1970s suggested an acceptance of Asian Americans by white Americans as full citizens. Yet, as Lee observes, Asian Americans were still perceived as an "enemy alien" so that "the model minority is revealed to be a simulacrum, a copy for which no original exists, and thus a false model of the American family" (11). This false model is revealed, for example, in the above headlines where the Chinese American Michelle Kwan, despite her assimilated American identity and culture, is implicated by her Asian face betraying her as a non-American.

The above examples suggest that both negative images of Asians, as an alien enemy, and positive images of Asians, as a model minority, have prevented them from being viewed as American. But the foreignness of Asians in America has exhibited itself in further complex ways. Lee illustrates the construction of Asians (both males and females) during the mid nineteenth century as a "third sex," generating their image as "ambiguous, inscrutable, and hermaphroditic" (85). This exotic rendition of Asian men and women as a "third sex" not only relegated them to a lower-class status amid a Victorian society that championed the chastity and virtue of white manhood and womanhood. It also helped white Americans to act out their sexual repression, by tolerating if not encouraging establishment of Chinese brothels (88).[7] Lee observes that "more than 10,000 Chinese women were brought, for the most part forcibly, to the United States as prostitutes." These women thus "embodied the available and mute but proletarianized sexuality that mirrored the exoticized female long displayed in the Western literary tradition of Orientalism" (88).[8] On one hand, Asians were seen as a "sexual threat." On the other hand, white men who turned to Asian prostitutes were able to sexually liberate themselves while seemingly maintaining the purity of their American racial identity.[9]

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[7] See Nancy Cott, Cynthia Eagle Russett and Jane Turner Censer.

[8] Lee explains, "The Page Act of 1870 . . . [while it] ostensibly prohibited 'Chinese, Japanese, and Mongolian women' from being brought to or entering the United States to 'engage in immoral or licentious activities' . . . effectively closed off the immigration of Chinese wives of immigrants already in the United States. But it did little to stop the illegal trade in women, which was protected by corrupt officials on both sides of the Pacific" (89).

[9] In citing the work of Barbara Meil Hobson, Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition, Lee observes, "In his 1858 study of prostitution in New York, the social reformer William Sanger found that fully one quarter of his male respondents had visited prostitutes" (88).

Minstrelsy, both blackface and yellowface, also provided white Americans an outlet for release through racialized song and dance. In addition, minstrelsy primarily performed by Irish immigrants in the second part of the nineteenth century allowed their racial assimilation into American society. Lee writes, "In order to find a place within the category of the people defined in *Herrenvolk* republican terms as a white working class, the Irish simultaneously had to escape the status of the permanent proletariat and, in the face of considerable social discrimination, to consolidate their racial status as white" (70). By capitalizing on their contribution to American culture, they were not only able to raise their social status but also to affirm their place as "real 'white' Americans" (70). This was exemplified in the song "Denis Kearney, The White Working Man's Hero" in which Irish laborers positioned themselves distinctly as white against other, nonwhite laborers. Lee includes two powerful stanzas from the song: "You have heard of Moriarty, Mulcahey and Malone, / Also of McNamara, O'Malley and Muldoon; / But I will sing of Kearney, an anti-Chinaman, / He's down upon Mongolians, and all their dirty clan. / So give three cheers for Kearney, / For he's a solid man; / He'll raise a grand big army / and drive out the Chinaman" (71). Like the characters of Jim Crow (of the South) and Zip Coon (of the North) in blackface minstrelsy, the role of John Chinaman functioned not only to stabilize the position of Irish people in America, but also to warn Americans of the "Chinese problem." The fear instigated by the constructed image of this threat reinforced a notion of patriotism as "white" Americans united in trying to protect their families against a common enemy, the alien invaders.[10]

While Chinese inferiority was reinforced through lyrics and the performance of actors imitating Chinese as a means of becoming white, beginning in the nineteenth century, Krystyn R. Moon's Yellowface observes how this notion of inferiority was rooted in a Euro-American ethnocentrism that dismissed Chinese music as "noise" that was "un-musical" (28). She writes, "Many Euro-American musicians and writers created race-based distinctions between music and noise, used attitudes about race to question whether the Chinese could participate in Western music and performance, and finally, circulated anti-Chinese stereotypes" (3). Music and performance went hand-in-hand, culminating in the justification of the exclusionary laws, beginning in 1882, directed toward ending Chinese immigration.[11] Moon observes, "like African Americans and Native Americans,

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[10] On blackface minstrelsy among Irish Americans see David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (115-132).

[11] See Moon, Chapter Two, "Toward Exclusion: American Popular Songs on Chinese Immigration, 1850-1882."

the Chinese were seen by whites as inassimilable; however, unlike other groups, these immigrants were small enough in number that it was possible to imagine keeping them out and seeing those already here vanish in a generation" (31).

Thus, according to Moon, Chinese caricatures served as proof that Chinese immigrants were unable to become "real Americans," and reinforced a notion of Chinese inferiority. Moon describes how minstrel writers emphasized the foreignness of the Chinese by constructing the names of characters based upon incoherent gibberish, mocking the sounds of the Chinese language. An 1854 musical production, Kimka, for example, included names such as "Bang-Wang-ski-hui-fon-fom-tor-touf, Has-sam-flam-dram and Ding-dong-chow-row-crac-wac" for the Chinese characters (27). Moreover, the mocking of Asian languages and sounds resurfaces within our contemporary society. For example, in 2003, NBA basketball star Shaquille O'Neal, playing for the Los Angeles Lakers, was reported to have taunted his rival Yao Ming, of the Houston Rockets, stating, "Tell Yao Ming, 'ching-chong-yang-wah-ah-soh.'" When confronted for his racist remarks, O'Neal dismissed accusations, stating he was merely joking, and directing attention, instead, to Yao's unfamiliarity with Americans' sense of humor ("Shaq Says Mock Accent Was Used Jokingly").

Language, as demonstrated through the constructed character names, played a central role in ridiculing Chinese immigrants by exaggerating their use of Pidgin English. Moon emphasizes the severity of this aspect of the minstrel show by stating, "In general, the use of dialects marked a group of people as unassimilated, or inassimilable, and therefore they did not speak English properly. Nonsensical gibberish, which was common in blackface minstrelsy and in nursery songs for children, was another device used to demonstrate the inferiority of the Chinese immigrants and their inability to speak English coherently" (42).

There were also other ways that minstrels mocked Chinese immigrants, as scholars note. In the nineteenth century, minstrels practiced imitating Chinese by their wearing hair in queues and utilizing make-up to alter their skin color and to slant their eyes. And yellow-faced minstrels, Moon writes, "depicted Chinese immigrants as eating a combination of domesticated animals and vermin—namely, dogs, cats, rats, and mice" (47). All of these elements of minstrelsy strengthened the image of Chinese as savage, barbaric, and morally corrupt, implicitly reinforcing an image of white American superiority.

Both yellowface minstrelsy and the racially constructed images of Asians within American popular culture—playing upon an assumption of Asian

inferiority—demonstrate the impact of visual images upon our culture serving more than merely to entertain. They crystallize an American history built upon legacies of violence, hatred and racism. These images, however, become dangerous, according to Moon, when they "challenge the ideals of democratic nationalism and the narrative unity of the nation" (4). Even in attempting to revise these unifying narratives, historians have painted a picture of America that tells only half of the story. While historians do not necessarily distort historical facts, Caroline Chung Simpson's *An Absent Presence* explores how certain historical events, such as the Japanese American internment, are remembered inaccurately. In so doing, her work explores the critical role images have played in not only helping us remember the past, but also, through their manipulation of what is shown, helping us to forget the past as well.

Simpson begins her book by noting the paradox in the "historical absence of an event that is perhaps the most widely reported and studied episode in Asian American history: the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II" (1). She argues, "The internment exists everywhere in the immediate postwar as a vacated history" (3). While it becomes the center for Asian American history, the memory of the internment is overshadowed in Americans' memory of World War II only as a "the war against the tyranny and oppression of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan" (9). Thus the flaws within American democracy remain obscured. In demonstrating how this moment can be both remembered and forgotten, Simpson observes, "when the nation observed the fiftieth anniversary of V-J Day [Victory over Japan] in 1995, all three major television networks and CNN replayed the same scenes of American GIs and civilians "flooding the streets and, in a tumult of raucous cheer, blocking traffic, chanting, setting off firecrackers" (14) from Life, including the now legendary Alfred Eisenstaedt photograph of the young white sailor capturing a white nurse in an impromptu victory embrace" (14). How the internment camps are remembered also leads to interpreting these camps as a success. This positive view toward the camps once again deters criticism away from an American government that violated civil rights by incarcerating Japanese Americans without a trial.

In another example, Simpson describes *Life* magazine's decision to publish photographs of several "pressure boys" or "no-no boys," Japanese men who, upon being questioned, refused to forswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor and refused to affirm a willingness to serve on combat duty for the United States armed forces, thus risking harsher incarceration in California or even deportation to Japan. Simpson describes the ways *Life* focused on the "troublemakers" and "capitalized on the intrigue behind the otherwise dreary story of Japanese

American detention during World War II" (22). Rather than depicting the "dreariness" of the camps and focusing its attention, for example, on imprisoned women and children, which might garner a sympathetic public eye, the focus of this "intrigue" functioned to create a story that promulgated the necessity of these camps. While the image of the "pressure boys" functioned to draw attention to these men as "trouble-makers," Simpson observes the temporary impact this image has in telling the Japanese internment history. She writes, "Although photojournalistic essays such as [Carl] Mydan's *Life* article became critical to documenting the major events of the twentieth century, they also inevitably manipulated points of ambiguity that left them in many ways open to unintentional expression of counter-historical elements" (26). In addition, she observes how the photo's text, "these five Japs are among 155 trouble-makers," referring to five men dressed in western clothing, drew attention to these men as "an exclusively alien or a national masculine threat." Thus this image—rather than capturing the significance of this historical moment centering on their resistance to the internment—functions as "counter-history" (26). While these images of Japanese internment remain to document and record history, they do so in such a way that lets America "off the hook" for its historical "mistake."

In Simpson's book we can also read the account of Iva Toguri d'Aquino, prosecuted as "Tokyo Rose," "the mysterious seductress whom GIs imagined pursued them during the war," (81) as a counter-history. Tokyo Rose began as a collective of "English-speaking female [radio] disc jockeys," whose shows were "designed to play on [American] GI's homesickness and fears" (76-77) and aired through the Japanese Broadcasting Company. In 1945, when the U.S. occupied Japan, a hunt to find a real Tokyo Rose ensued into what Simpson describes as an "obsession with identifying domestic traitors" (83). The hunt, instigated by U.S. governmental officials, ended in the trial and conviction for treason of Japanese American d'Aquino, who was convicted of eight counts of treason, served six years in prison, was fined $10,000, and was stripped of her citizenship for thirty years before being pardoned. The case suggested the pervasive inability to distinguish Japanese Americans from alien Japanese, despite their U.S. citizenry. Thus Simpson seeks to recall this significant moment that has often been dismissed because it "provides the literal link between the initial postwar uncertainty and the later, well-known history of excesses of McCarthyism [and] also because it allows us to approach the recollection of this link within the terms of the comparatively obscured story of Japanese American counter-history during the same period, thereby revealing how the ambivalence of Japanese American identity became implicated in a trial that was a harbinger of the cold war to come" (84). Still further, the mythological construction of

Tokyo Rose demonstrates the dual roles associated with racialized Asian female constructions within our popular culture. Simpson observes, "Tokyo Rose, as a myth, blended two more general Asian female stereotypes: the 'dragon lady,' the monstrous reptilian, orientalized female, and the exotic, sensationalized oriental doll" (88). Within the public imagination she became both a threat as a "Japanese menace" (82) and sexual lure as an "oriental femme fatale" (88).

Another example revealed by Caroline Simpson is the imagery within popular culture of the 1950s Japanese war brides who "married to the white soldiers" (11). This constructed image served not only to refute the trauma caused by the Japanese internment but also served as "an early form of the model minority" (151). Simpson observes, "Almost overnight, the coverage of Japanese war brides transformed what were viewed as opportunistic aliens into gracious and hard-working traditional housewives fully accepted by white Americans" (11). Ironically these Japanese war brides were represented to have assimilated fully within American society in which Americans had historically justified the exclusion of Chinese and Japanese Americans on the basis that they were inassimilable. Whether the war brides would be fully accepted or not mattered little to those who attempted to manipulate their image, serving as the solution to the "postwar dilemma" (151) that left many Japanese and Japanese Americans impoverished and displaced resulting from the internment experience.

Meanwhile, in *Thinking Orientals,* Henry Yu interrogates the historically widespread view of inassimilable Asians and examines the consequences that have resulted from this belief. An assumed Asian inability to assimilate served as the premise for justifying Asians' exclusion from an American identity and society, and functioned to maintain a view of Asians as perpetual foreigners regardless of how long they had been in the United States.

By tracing the paths of Chicago sociologists in the early 1900s, focusing on the influential conjectures of Robert Park who constructed a discourse for Asians understood through the concept as the "Oriental Problem," Yu explains, "The main aspect of what Park saw as the Oriental Problem was the inability of Orientals to achieve the last step of the assimilation cycle because of 'race consciousness' among whites" (41). While they would be able to lose their accents and utilize clothing as a "disguise," race became the determining factor that kept them outsiders (66). Although Yu observes the sincerity behind Park's attempt to find a solution to the Oriental problem so that Asians would eventually be perceived as Americans, Yu observes the ways Park participated in a process of exoticization. In relaying the findings in one of Park's "experiments," Yu reaches the disturbing conclusion,

> [a] Japanese American woman fascinated Park and provided an ideal example of how the white sociologists thought of Orientals: 'I found myself watching her expectantly for some slight accent, some gesture or intonation that would betray her racial origin,...When I was not able, by the slightest expression, to detect the Oriental mentality behind the Oriental mask, I was still not able to escape the impression that I was listening to an American woman in a Japanese disguise. (67)

In addition, Yu explains, "Robert Park's interest in the young American woman in a Japanese disguise…had to do with her being the embodiment of successful assimilation at its extreme, a perfectly 'normal' American wearing an exotic Halloween mask. At the same time Park argued for the sameness of Orientals and whites, he was also asserting their exotic difference, their perpetual foreignness" (68). The mask suggested by Park reinforces the view that Asians could not be perceived as Americans because they did not look like Americans.

In further elaborating how Asians were able to assimilate in all ways outside of "looking" American, Park's work led him to the theory of the "marginal man." To Park, the marginal man suffered from "being caught between two worlds" (108). Yu explains that the example of one Japanese American, Kazuo Kawaii, a 20 year old UCLA college student and "aspiring writer" (99) who "wrote a twenty-page life history for the [Chicago] sociologists" (97) served as the prototype for how Asians in America would come to be characterized. The problem, according to Yu, was that the work performed by the Chicago sociologists in the "construction of the Oriental Problem created categories for understanding Oriental existence in America by taking individual stories, universalizing them, and reapplying them as objective laws. Knowledge of what it was like to be Oriental in America was thus alienated from Orientals and returned to them in the form of esoteric theories, wrapped in the language of social science" (110).

But like other constructions of Asians, the marginal man, while liberating to some, confined them in a trap of "in-betweenness." Caroline Simpson observes, "because the 'marginal man' was described as lacking national identity, a person 'without direction and control,' he would also find it virtually impossible to complete the process of assimilation as Parks [sic] described it" (58). According to Simpson, "To embrace uncritically the concept of the Asian American as a 'marginal man' is, then, to prolong rather than resolve the alienation of Asians in America" (59).

Both Yu's and Simpson's critique of the marginal man construction aims at demonstrating the dilemma consistently faced by Asians in America as both a problem and a solution. Their place "in-between" their Asian heritage and their American location would metaphorically serve to explain their historical objectification into an image that is familiar and foreign, embraced and rejected.

Within contemporary American society, the assumption that Asian Americans are "problem-free" and a "model minority" is deeply problematic on a number of levels. First, it perpetuates their invisibility, overlooking concerns specific to Asian America under an illusion of inclusion as assimilated Americans. Second, it creates hostilities among other Americans of color by positing Asian Americans as a standard of achievement by measuring their assumed "success" as "honorary whites" delineating and reinforcing a notion of white superiority against non-white inferiority.[12] Finally, it conceals a history of racial discrimination towards Asians in America rooted in a racism that views them as perpetual foreigners. The consequences of "foreignizing" the Asian body instigated within popular culture reveals itself within contemporary society in which representations of Asians are limited to a handful of caricatures such as the "tourist," "wise Confucius master," "the foreign exchange student," the "dictatorial immigrant parent" and the "prostitute."

This review of the works of Robert G. Lee, Krystyn R. Moon, Connie Chung Simpson, and Henry Yu shows how historical constructions of the Asian body have morphed into a dual representation, imagining and appropriating Asians as being both "good" and "evil", "asexual" and "sexual," "included" and "excluded." These works show several approaches to study of how American popular culture has interpreted or reacted to Asians' presence in America, implicating Asian Americans in a history of exclusion as well as a history of reinforcement of a normative American identity and culture.

[12] Gary Okihiro explains that Asian Americans were identified as "honorary whites" in Newsweek's 1971 article "Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites" (34).

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